WHERE COBWEBS THRIVE ON MANHATTAN ISLE

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Drawing by L. M. GLACKENS

FATHER KNICKERBOCKER'S PICTURE GALLERY AT TUBBY HOOK

1—The Sweetser House on Fort Washington Avenue. 2—Libby Castle, once the home of Boss Tweed. 3—Trellised roses on house where Joseph Keppler, one of the founders of "Puck," once lived. 4—House once occupied by Nathan Straus, on Bolton Road

DO YOU like to dream dreams about old houses? Do you like to investigate neglected mansions of a past age, picturing the life that flowed through the high-ceilinged rooms now so musty and decayed?

If you are a New Yorker it isn't necessary to travel to New England to indulge in this pastime. Forty minutes by subway from the shopping district, a brief walk, and you are in a region of old houses. Some crown the green hills of Inwood, which downtown excursionists are beginning to discover, and some, stranded on the streets, are rudely shouldered by modern apartment houses of glaring brick. But there they are, and in some of them you will find white-haired men and women whose talk takes you back to a day earlier than that in which the characters of Edith Wharton's "The Age of Innocence" lived.

Fancy going into a house a few steps from the Dyckman ferry and finding two brothers and a sister who have dwelt there sixty years! These are the Flitners, children of a Maine sea captain, who, landing at the Hudson River dock with barges of lumber from the North, was so charmed with these shores that he brought his family here to live. Get them talking and they tell you of a time when there were but seven buildings above 187th Street, east of Kingsbridge Road. In their childhood the winter skating was the social event of the locality. The lads damned up a brook that ran just north of Inwood Street, now Dyckman Street, and made a wide pond between two small hills. At night they lighted fires of tar barrels and waste wood on the banks, and the community gathered and sang and shouted and did marvelous things on the ice. Perhaps the winters were colder then, for, as Charles Flitner remembers it, there was always ice from fall to spring.

The Flitner house is well preserved. But just above it, at the first turn of Bolton Road, is a square red house of spacious rooms and staircases of noble lines going to rack and ruin in a way one hates to see, all the more because it is a common story in these parts.

Old inhabitants say it was the policy of the New York Central that left Tubby Hook, as Inwood used to be called, in a forgotten pocket between two rivers, unpeopling the beautiful houses and abandoning them to ghosts. In 1871 that railroad diverted its trains, save one or two slow locals, from the Hudson River tracks to the east bank of the Harlem. Not till 1900 did the first trolley cars run to Kingsbridge, and it was five years later when the subway was extended to Dyckman Street. For a good many years this most attractive part of Manhattan Island was rather inaccessible, except for the men who could afford their horses.

In 1844, when Samuel Thomson, wealthy man of affairs, built the little church that still stands at Broadway and Dyckman Street, men were content to be leisurely. Tubby Hookers who went to business by the 7:53 gossiped in agreeable groups on the station platform till the conductor decided that there were no more tardy passengers to arrive. Elegant ones drove to the city over the Bloomingdale Road, a shaded street that ran down Breakneck Hill past the Hamilton Grange, and those who remember say it was a fine sight to see the elder James McCreery, the merchant prince, coming down from his home at the end of the River Road, "the last house on Manhattan Island," behind his team of spanking bays. But Tubby Hookers grew tired of depending on horseflesh and the infrequent trains, and one by one they moved away from their mansions and their landscaped gardens.

In 1796 Mount Washington was the popular name for the whole range of hills from Manhattanville to Spuyten Duyvil, and traces of the outworks of Fort Washington are to be found from end to end of them now. But as time went on the upper section became known as Tubby Hook, perhaps because the Dutch sailors who went up the Hudson and who called every point of land a "hook," saw in the bay of the Spuyten Duyvil a resemblance to a tub, with the steep wooded hills for sides. Isaac M. Dyckman and William B. Isham and the Vermilye, Nagle and Post families, who among them owned most of the rich lowlands to the eastward, always spoke of their "farms at Tubby Hook." Then Inwood became the name of this region and the hills to the south Washington Heights. But it is all one chain of beauty, and for years men like Reginald Pelham Bolton, its stanch defender and preserver, and George Barnard, the sculptor, whose studio stands high on "God's Thumb" above the Hudson, have been saying to City Hall:

"See here! In the wooded hills and slopes that line the water from Jeffrey's Hook, at 177th Street, to Spuyten Duyvil, New York has the most wonderful potential pleasure ground that city ever had. Purchase it, improve it, preserve it for all time to come."

And first the Board of Estimate and Apportionment would say: "We will." And then it would say: "We can't. Our constituents would not let us spend so much money." It has pursued, in short, a policy that has kept wonderful residential possibilities from becoming anything more. Who wants to spend money restoring old houses or building new ones when no one knows when or where Father Knickerbocker may lay out his parks and roads?

However, the slow development had one advantage. It left sleeping below the surface of Dyckman Valley evidences of Indian life—native tools and weapons and remains of the dog burials of the redmen of 300 years ago, that Mr. Bolton and W. L. Calver and other ardent excavators might find them for the museums of to-day.

Half a block east of the ferry Prescott Avenue, a narrow unpaved way, runs from Dyckman Street over Inwood Hill. Upper Bolton Road starts from Prescott Avenue just above Dyckman and goes windingly first west, then north, then east. Here is where bankers, lawyers and editors of that past generation had their country seats. On the slope between upper Bolton Road and Prescott Avenue and lower Bolton Road, or the River Road, which starts at the ferry, was the estate of Samuel Thomson, who came to Tubby Hook in 1835 and who was so ardent a republican that he quarrelled with his wife's titled relatives because he would not say "my lord." A son-in-law, Walter Carter, publisher, has left a description of his first drive up Bloomingdale Road to the Thomson grounds and of seeing Mr. Thomson reading the Bible of a morning "with a beaming face." He was a good churchman and built Mount Washington Presbyterian Church on his own grounds because he was so sorry to see his neighbors working in the fields on Sunday. But he was also a keen business man, as was shown by his buying 100 acres of land for $27,500 and shortly afterward selling one acre to J. B. West for $25,000. Three of his ten children became bank presidents, and the eldest, William A. Thomson, was for sixty years an officer of the Merchants' Exchange Bank. Not a trace of the Thomson mansion remains, and on its site, where the House of Mercy stands, the new Jewish hospital is to be built.

But if the Thomson house is razed, many others remain, some of them seeming to shrink back from the steep cut of Dyckman Street and to look down disapprovingly on the noisy traffic the ferry has brought. The old home of Captain William H. Flitner is at 17 Bolton Road. The Rev. Dr. George S. Payson, pastor of Mount Washington Church for forty years and more, records that the Captain was away much of the time "sailing the seven seas," but that his wife, Louisa, made his house "the abode of peace and gentleness."

On its door to-day one sees the words "Dyckman Library." It seems that Mrs. Alexander Hamilton, who was Elisabeth Schuyler, at her death left some money to establish a free school in the upper end of Manhattan Island. Before the bequest could be carried out the city inaugurated its public school system, and the money was invested in Broadway real estate. By an act of the Legislature the land was presently sold and the proceeds used to found a library, of which the three remaining members of the Flitner family—Charles, Clara and the Counselor—were given charge. Charles and Clara long taught in the school on Academy Street, which is now the George Washington High School, but now they take turns serving in the library, which seems surprisingly modern, with its new books and magazines, in the quaint old house.

Passing the falling-to-pieces red house on the hill, the home of the Talcott family a half century ago, and passing the modern House of Rest for consumptives, one comes to two large frame houses in the bend of the road across from the large brick buildings where the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children now has its shelter, and the Chapel of St. Mary's crowning the hill. Once there were three frame houses, but one of them was burned. In the beautiful one still standing in the corner Joseph Keppler, one of the founders of "Puck," once lived. For a long time it was vacant, and peering in at the windows one could see fragments of old furniture, and imagine, at twilight, no end of ghosts. In the night you could hear howling, most grewsome—howling of masterless dogs that had taken refuge in the caves of the valley below. Now the Keppler house is inhabited by a family

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OUR MR. HAYS HUMANIZES HIS HELP

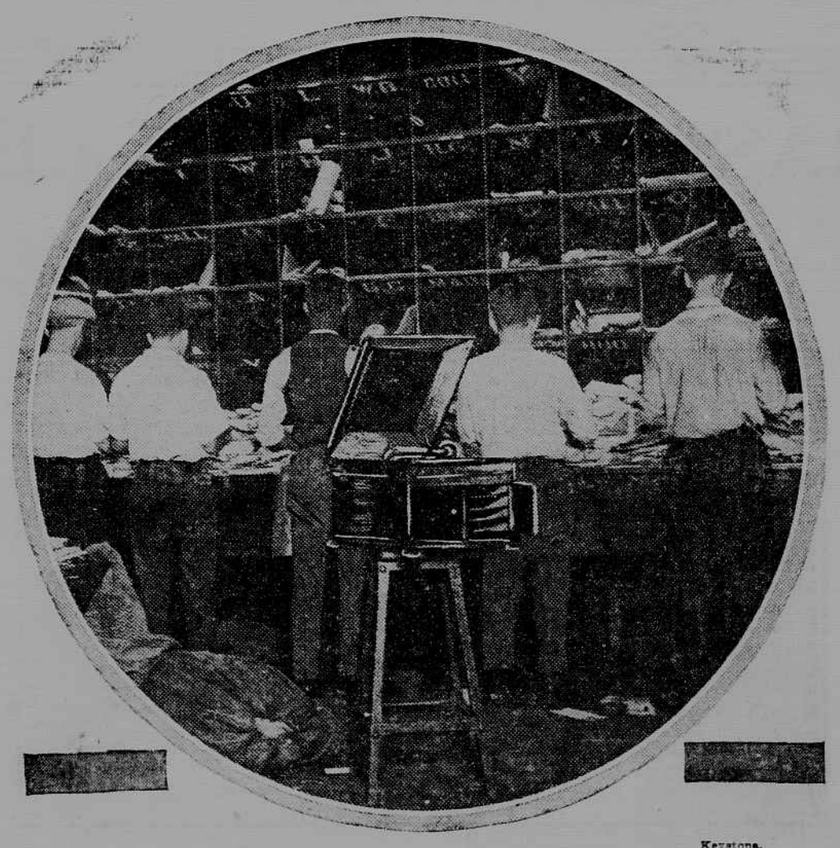
HUMANIZING the postoffice is a work that apparently is going grandly on, though it may not have reached the point where a clerk will say "Thank you" and ask you to call again when you have bought a money order.

Ocular demonstration of the progress of the work of humanizing the system is shown in the accompanying photograph of employees in the Indianapolis office throwing mail to the music of a phonograph.

There may be a catch in this particular phase of the humanizing work which even the postoffice employees do not suspect. It savors something of the scheme said to be successfully tried by dairymen—phonographs being turned on in the barn at milking time. Music, it is claimed, induces cows to give more milk. Perhaps also it will get more work out of those whose business it is to toss mail matter into its proper receptacles.

But, no matter what industrial results are achieved as by-products of the humanizing campaign, vast possibilities seem to be opened up by this installation of governmental phonographs in places where nothing but the thud of packages and the swish of letters have been heard hitherto.

If the postoffice can be "humanized" by means of phonograph records why will not the same plan work in other fields? Why, to pursue the matter relentlessly to the familiar logical conclusion, would not a phonograph soften the temper and features of the man who sells tickets for popular theatrical attractions—or, rather, the man who informs you that he has no tickets to sell. Under the spell of phonograph music in the box office that individual might even unbend in a smile occasionally as he ran his practiced and well-manicured hand up and down the ticket rack. Or he might even go so far as to find a pair of seats at the price desired in the part of the house specified, though this would be a good deal to expect, of course, in the first stages of the humanizing process.



Keystone.

Sorting mail to the jazz of a phonograph makes the lot of the Postoffice clerk a happy one—perhaps

If the postoffice can be humanized by phonograph methods why not banks as well? The average bank has lacked the intimate, homelike touch that tends to put the depositor at ease, even when he knows his account is $7 overdrawn. A phonograph installed in each department might remove the chill from the atmosphere and convert the bank into a substitute for that long-vanished "poor man's club," the saloon.

Humanizing the subway and elevated guard service is something that invites attention. This could be done, of course, only through phonographs equipped with sound magnifiers, but if a guard were properly played to between stations there is no telling to what lengths of politeness he might be lured. The experiment is well worth trying, unless the Postmaster General has the idea patented.

Of other beckoning vistas it is hardly necessary to speak. There are taxi drivers, restaurant cashiers and occasional elevator pilots. There are club attendants and there are waiters and the rest of those who dominate their separate spheres of influence in hotels. There are sea captains, officeholders, office boys, bill collectors and others—yes, even including editors—whose calling might be made the better for a general collective humanizing done by phonograph installation.

And yet, when all has been humanized under this new system, there will remain one disturbing point.

How will the humanizing of the phonograph concerns be brought about?